DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 006 CS 512 527

AUTHOR	Smith, Carl B., Ed.
TITLE	Integrated Language Arts. ERIC Topical Bibliography and Commentary.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Institute of Education Sciences (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	TBC-030021
PUB DATE	2003-12-00
NOTE	6p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0028
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication, 2805 E. 10th St., #140, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698. Web site: http://reading.indiana.edu.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- ERIC Publications (071) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Behavior; Elementary Education; Instructional Effectiveness; *Integrated Curriculum; *Language Arts; Teacher Behavior
IDENTIFIERS	Direct Instruction

ABSTRACT

Most research supports the teaching of language arts in an integrated program. This topical bibliography and commentary addresses: how integrated language arts is carried out by school administrations; how integrated language arts is carried out by the teacher; whether integrated instruction helps improve learning performance in reading and writing; how the skills of phonics, comprehension, spelling, and grammar are developed in an integrated language arts environment; and whether there is room for direct instruction in an integrated language arts classroom. It concludes that as schools study the issue, they will become aware that integration is more than a different method of teaching, it is a philosophical change that will need support from administration, teachers, and parents. (Contains 16 references and 2 Internet addresses.) (RS)

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Integrated Language Arts

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Introduction

Integrated learning facilitates the process of connecting one subject with another. Bush (1994) contends that "[m]ost educators agree that children learn best when they see relevance and connections between what they are learning in science, reading, math, or art" (3). Wagner defines integrating language arts as "...providing natural learning situations in which reading, writing, speaking, and listening can be developed together for real purposes and real audiences" (Argo, 2). Teaching the various components of language arts (reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, etc.) in an integrated program allows students to experience how each subject contributes to the other. It is "learning one aspect of language arts in terms of another, rather than learning each aspect (reading, writing, spelling, vocabulary, grammar) as independent units (13).

How is integrated language arts carried out by the administration?

While integration occurs within the classroom, teachers will be better served if they are supported by the administration. Administration and supervisors can support the implementation of a language arts program in a variety of ways (Vogt, 1991, 207-08):

- Being open to new philosophies and approaches to literacy instruction..." (Vogt, 207) Allington asserts that:

  > If we are ever to rid ourselves of the conventional wisdom that has dominated literacy instruction for the past quarter-century, teachers will have to explore new ideas. Unraveling the conventional wisdom that led us to create bottom reading groups, a slow-it-down pedagogy, fragmented curricular approaches, and the second system of education will require teachers to explore new organizational schemes for classrooms and curricula (Allington, 1993, 10).
- Work in collaboration with teachers, parents and students to plan and problem solve. This allows more responsibility to be shared by parents and students, rather than all resting with the teacher.
- Keep abreast of current research and know how to implement the research.
- Allow teachers transition time as they learn how to integrate language arts. The Idaho Department of Education recommends "[a] sequential, long-term staff development program in integrated language arts" (Idaho, 8). This requires a commitment of time for teacher preparation.
- Provide teachers with necessary resources. Texts are not necessary, but are useful in providing teachers with a framework for teaching. Teachers should be free to select "materials and activities which support and meet identified student needs" (Idaho State Dept. of Ed., 1990, 5). Many schools prefer using trade books rather than basal readers as the primary text.
- Revise their way of supervising and evaluating teachers. Because the components of an integrated language arts lesson will differ from the traditional approach to lesson planning, new methods of evaluation need to be devised.

How is integrated language arts carried out by the teacher?

Wager gives three approaches for achieving integration of language arts within the classroom. The first is having the students learn "each of the language arts in terms of the others" (Wager, cited in Argo, 3). For example, writing skills are developed by composing oral and rough drafts, reading drafts to friends, rewriting, and other related activities. The second suggestion is to teach "each language element [a]s a part of the whole, not a set of isolated components." The third suggestion is to teach language arts through content of other subjects such as social studies or science (Argo, 3).

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According to Allington (1993), many schools implement a literature-based integrated language arts curriculum that has four types of curricular organization.

1. The Basal Curriculum: Newer basals offer more integration of the language arts program by "emphasizing anthologies of children's literature...composition activities linked to the stories read, spelling and editing lessons, and dramatic enactments" (Allington, 1993, 8). Classrooms that use the basal curriculum have tradebooks, but tradebooks and classroom libraries are used for personal independent reading.
2. Basal Plus Books: This approach uses a literature-emphasis basal series, but also links tradebooks to the basal reading. Teachers select only the basal activities they feel are appropriate and may use the basal series only a few days each week, supplementing with tradebooks and other integrated activities for the remainder of the week.
3. Books Plus Basal: This approach uses the basal as an anthology. Teachers may focus on particular skills and strategy lessons from the basal, however, tradebooks are primarily used to drive instruction.
4. Books Classroom: In this setting, tradebooks are solely used to develop thematic units of study and integrated into a language arts curriculum.

Research suggests four elements that are important in implementing a successful integrated language arts program. These elements can be achieved regardless of the curricular approach or organizational method chosen.

1. The *activities* children are required to do in school matter.

   > "If we fill their days with an array of assignments that require them primarily to locate and remember discrete bits of information, abstract rules, and isolated skills, we should not be surprised to find they experience difficulty when asked to complete work that would require evaluating, summarizing, contrasting, discussing, composing, enacting, or responding. (Allington, 10).

   Allington proposes that emphasis in learning should not center around books read, people or places studied, or other particular facts, so much as "what kinds of wok they [children] did while reading, studying, or examining" (11). Integrated activities allow children to "see the links between comprehending and composing, between decoding and spelling, between reading and vocabulary, and so on" (11).
2. Activities are only useful if they are supported by explicit, personalized *teaching*. Allington offers a definition of what "good teaching" entails. "It seems that the explicit teacher talk that models strategies, supports attempts to apply these strategies, encourages risk-taking, fosters thinking and praises good effort is absolutely essential..." (11). He encourages teachers to engage the students in discussions, allowing them to puzzle through problems and stories together. This promotes a "thoughtful", discussion-oriented classroom rather than one which confuses interrogation and question-answering with comprehension (Allington & Weber, 1992 as cited in Allington, 12).
3. Students and teachers alike need *time* to learn and teach. Allington proposes "large uninterrupted blocks of time to learn and to engage in reading, writing, and discussion" (13). He bases his proposal on the assumption that the best way to read a book or write an essay is not in 10-20 minute blocks of time. Rather, he suggests restructuring the day into two or two and one half-hour blocks of totally uninterrupted time for language arts. An extended day program or Saturday school program may be developed for children who need additional instructional time (13).
4. Just as supervision and evaluation of teachers needs to be revised with integrated language arts, so the *assessment* of students must be reconsidered. According to the Idaho State Dept. of Education, "[a]ssessment should be aligned with curriculum and instruction and incorporate a variety of methods suited to the purpose of the assessment" (5). Examples of methods more suited to integrated programs are: student portfolios, anecdotal records and criterion-referenced tests. Report cards should also be revised to accurately reflect the curriculum. Schools may or may not choose to report individual grades for each subject (reading, language, spelling, etc.) when the subjects are integrated within a language arts curriculum (Idaho, 6).

Does integrated instruction help improve learning performance in reading and writing?

Various studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of integrated learning. In 1992 Bartch implemented a study in her classroom to "increase interest and achievement in spelling by integrating spelling with reading and writing" (Argo, 4). The results were "that the children were successful

at their own level...Children [began] using spelling strategies throughout the day, not only during spelling time" (4). A study conducted by Schmelz (1994) reported a different outcome.

> The study consisted of 76 remedial English students in the 10th grade, examined over the period of one academic year. The children were assigned either to traditional classrooms without access to computers (control group) or to a computer laboratory where instruction was presented using a computer-based integrated learning system and occasional teacher-directed lessons (experimental group) (Argo, 4-5).

This study "indicated a higher gain in reading comprehension for students in a traditional English classroom than for students in a computer-based integrated learning system" (Argo, 44).

Thames (1993) studied "[t]he effects an integrated language arts instructional program [had] on reading comprehension skills of learning lab students" (Thames, 3). The results showed that "significant improvement was made by the students in all levels of reading comprehension except in the ability to recognize cause-effect relationships" (15).

In 1995 Argo studied the achievements of an integrated language arts program for sixth grade students. The results indicated that "the integrated approach of language arts instruction yields higher achievement in reading comprehension...spelling...language mechanics...language expression...language total" (Argo, 46).

In other studies conducted by VanTassel-Baska, Zup, Avery, and Little (2002), Hindin, Morrocco, and Aguilar (2001), and Berger (2001), the results all suggested that integrated language arts curriculum produced academic gains for students.

How are the skills of phonics, comprehension, spelling and grammar developed in an integrated language arts environment?

Phonics is seldom taught in the upper elementary grades, but Invernizzi proposes an integrated word study program that continues to teach students how words work (Invernizzi, 1997, 185). Using a literature-based integrated language arts program, students can study words by "grouping words into categories of similarity and difference" (185). Words from the literature book, or history unit being studied, may be grouped according to spelling or meaning categories such as comman*der*, offic*er*, soldi*er*, or hon*or*, fav*or*, etc. Words may be classified according to parts of speech such as older, taller, bolder, or water, river, saber, etc. (186-87).

Comprehension skills are taught through interpreting, analyzing and evaluating the elements of story: setting, characters, plot, point of view, and theme. Literature selections should be discussed, written about, dramatized and retold. Outcomes of stories are predicted and conclusions drawn (Idaho, 28-29).

Spelling should be taught "through writing and reading experiences...Teachers can support the students' ability to use self-monitoring and self-correcting behaviors in their own written work by providing opportunities for students to practice proof-reading and editing" (Idaho, 8).

In Bartch's project to increase achievement in spelling, she integrated spelling with reading and writing. The spelling workbook was set aside and spelling words were chosen from their literature, writing and reading. She reported that not only were the children becoming independent spellers, but they were using "spelling strategies throughout the day, not only during spelling time" (Argo, 4).

Grammar "should be studied in the context of the students' actual oral and written communication" (Idaho, 6). Kane suggests that "teachers can accomplish a lot in the name of language instruction just by reading well-crafted texts to their students" (Kane, 1997, 72). She advocates teaching grammar from professional authors who know how to use language well. When teaching punctuation, or parts of speech, she encourages teachers to use the books children are reading (71).

Is there room for direct instruction in an integrated language arts classroom?

Few research articles mentioned direct instruction. The Idaho State Dept. of Education's guide to implementing a language arts program in K-8th grade recommends a direct instruction approach to teaching phonics, however the instruction should still be drawn from other contexts: "Phonics should be systematically taught and applied within the meaningful contexts of reading and writing" (8). This distinction is also made in teaching grammar: "When necessary, specific grammar skills should be taught systematically and *in context* to improve reading, writing and speaking" (6). They also recognize that "[c]omponents of the spelling program may include direct instruction of high frequency words and words derived from student writing" (8).

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Conclusion

Most research supports the teaching of language arts in an integrated program. Argo cites de-Tagle (1988) and Wagner's conclusions summarized in *Proposal for a National Program on Accelerated Literacy:*

> de-Tagel reported that teachers in various parts of the country who have used integrative learning principles in their classrooms have noted 'dramatic gains in students' test scores and significant reductions in the amount of time required for learning' (p. 1). Wagner (1986) stated "classroom-based research—longitudinal, ethnographic, case study, and classic control-group comparisons of student performance under various instructional conditions—supports integrations of the language arts' (p. 2)" (as cited in Argo, 5-6).

As schools study the issue, they will become aware that integration is more than a different method of teaching, it is a philosophical change that will need support from administrators, teachers, and parents.

Internet Resources

* Engaging Students in the Disciplines of English: What Are Successful Schools Doing?
This article addresses ways to keep students interested in literature, composition, and language study.
http://cela.albany.edu/publication/article/engaging.htm

* Guidelines for Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well
These guidelines draw upon a report by Judith Langer, in which she discusses her findings based on research in 25 schools in 4 states. This booklet is designed for middle and high school teachers and administrators who wish to improve their English programs.
http://cela.albany.edu/publication/brochure/guidelines.pdf

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